



**Civil Rights Commission**

2008 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest  
"Breaking Barriers"

Jaida Raquel Morgan – First Place

Dear Martin Luther King,

Hello. I am a thirteen-year-old girl, and I am in the eighth grade at an all-girls school in Seattle. I have been learning about many concepts, beliefs, and facts inside and outside of school. I am learning more and more about African American history, but also the history of those before the slaves, and those people that were originally in Africa. As an African-American, I am learning about far we have come and how I can appreciate the privileges that I am being given.

Everyday I see that as a people, a race, and a culture, African-Americans are valued more. We can get the same jobs and go to the same schools as our white or Caucasian friends. What you did, during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and when you gave the "I Have a Dream" speech, is to make my life easier than yours. Even though you were threatened with bombings, accusations, and sentences to prison, you told the world what you thought was fair, and voiced your opinions. Not only that, but the many other speeches, and projects that you wrote, and participated in, have helped me understand what I am able to have. I am learning to appreciate that more and more.

I see that you opened some doors, and broke some barriers for me. Your works and writings gave me the right to attend the best schools in the state of Washington. As an African American, I have to strive to do what is best for me, and that means doing well in school. Thanks to your work in lifting that huge barrier to education, I plan to take full advantage.

Dr. King, you have given me the opportunity to do what is best for me in this world. You have helped me secure a better education. In your Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, you said, "I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits." As a child in this modern world, I feel that I have tried to live up to what you dreamed of, by becoming part of programs that help people of color succeed in school, in college, and beyond. I can see that our nation, the United States, is trying to live up to your dream.

It's hard to believe that giving everyone equal opportunities continues to be a controversial subject in America now. For example, there are poor people in the United States that face barriers everyday. Some feel that a person living under the poverty line is there because of their own way of living, and that they should try and help themselves by "making better choices.". Others feel that we should help those poorer people. Many are poor because they don't have the correct schooling, and because they were not brought up with enough support, or even because they have learning differences. I believe that we should help everyone by creating educational opportunities, things like community colleges, where they can learn to write a resume and to get a job. Dr. King, you knew that when you launched the Poor People's Campaign, in the late 1960's, giving hope to the families and people with lower-incomes. Now that people need help financially, this barrier to education stops people from the best path to freedom and equality, and your ideas and works could help the world save itself.

I feel that the United States, as a whole, should try and help those in need. I still believe in the Poor People's Campaign because not everyone has the help they need. This is the barrier that I want to break, because this world is in turmoil, and if people listen to your words, like they did when you spoke on segregation, I believe that life will get better here in the United States.

What fueled you to make this decision, to be active in human rights and Civil Rights? What made you feel so passionate to help others? I ask you this because I am in the same place. While I am not as committed to non-violence as you were, I feel like I was placed on this earth to help others to better their lives, and do what is right for them. We have the same views and I, like you, want to break the barriers that remain in this world.

I always ask myself what I can do better and how I can help change the world. I also ask myself, what barriers can I help break as I strive to make the world a better place? But, because there are many things wrong with our world, like social class, mental illness, drug-addiction, and poverty I want to find a way and follow your actions of non-violence and leadership, but sometimes it is hard for me. At the end of the day, I want to feel like I have accomplished something, and looking at what you have done for me, I feel like I can break the barriers that are still all around me.

From,  
An Eighth grader in Seattle

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